

Office of Child Support Community Advisory Council

Charter

November 22, 2019

Revised February 20, 2020

Purpose

An advisory council is a neutral, nonbinding group, composed of community members and stakeholders, that gives input, insights, and strategic advice to inform the design and implementation of programs and services. Advisory councils can help programs perform more efficiently and equitably.

The Office of Child Support (OCS) Community Advisory Council will adhere to these tenets of community engagement:

- Work collaboratively;
- Participate in the reciprocal transfer of knowledge among all collaborators and partners;
- Nurture an ongoing relationship;
- Address issues affecting well-being; and
- Involve community members as partners in decision-making.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' (MDHHS's) Office of Child Support will administer and support the council. OCS is committed to involving members of the community in its decision-making processes.

Goals and Objectives

The primary goal of the council is to elevate the voices, interests, ideas and concerns of under-represented customers of Michigan's child support program in the development of child support policies. The council will help shape and influence the policies and practices of the child support program, with the final result being child support program outcomes that are more equitable for all families the program serves.

The following objectives will help in meeting this goal:

- Representatives of Michigan's child support program will seek to build trust and transparency through their interactions with the council.
- OCS will engage with the council early enough in the policy development cycle for the council's input to be useful and meaningful (i.e., the council will participate in actual policy development, rather than exclusively comment on already-developed policy).¹
- OCS commits to incorporating to the greatest extent possible the input and recommendations of the council, while balancing that with any legal, financial, and internal structure limitations that may exist.

¹ There are policies where there are no business decisions that impact families (e.g., internal form changes, procedures between internal work units, etc.). OCS, together with the council, will determine the types of policies, programs, and initiatives that will make the best use of the council's time and energy.

- OCS will obtain feedback and suggestions on drafted materials and revise them as appropriate.
- OCS will bring forward the council's impacts on its policies and programs by providing results, outcomes, and data to inform future council discussions.
- The council will openly bring its own experiences and the experiences of the communities its members live in, and seek to consider and understand communities not represented. The council will encourage and support individual members to share openly, honestly, and safely to reach its goal.

Scope

The key function of the OCS Community Advisory Council is to reduce inequities and better serve customers by helping shape and influence the policies and practices of Michigan's child support program. The council's focus is on procedures, programs, and policies related to OCS's administration of Michigan's Title IV-D program. Title IV-D refers to the section of the Social Security Act that authorizes federal funding for the child support program, specifically "services relating to the establishment of paternity or the establishment, modification, or enforcement of child support obligations."

Certain child support-related issues – for instance, custody and parenting time – do not fall under Title IV-D and are therefore not addressed or decided by OCS. While the council may discuss these issues, OCS is unable to directly affect related policies and procedures. OCS will work to deliver any recommendations or concerns to the relevant agencies.

Within this charter, references to the "child support program" or "child support policies" mean those that fall under Title IV-D and are the responsibility of OCS.

The work of the OCS Community Advisory Council will be done in service to two of the child support program's Strategic Plan goals:

- "Improve Child Support Processes" calls for using families' experiences to evaluate practices and use resources where they provide the most effective and efficient family-centered services.
- "Improve the Customer Experience" calls for ensuring that child support customers understand the processes and know they have been heard.

Approach

Since a key function of the OCS Community Advisory Council is to help shape and influence the policies and practices of the child support program, membership on the council should reflect the diverse communities that are directly involved with the program. By having a council that reflects the diversity within those communities, members will be able to provide the perspective of its various community groups.

Due to practical considerations, council membership will consist primarily or entirely of individuals from the greater Lansing/tri-county area. However, the council will influence processes, procedures, and policies that OCS implements statewide and consequently, council members will represent the interests of child support customers from the entire state.

To ensure that the council is representative of the entire state of Michigan, at least 50 percent of the council's members will be formally or informally affiliated with a community organization and able to represent not only their own personal views, but the principles and values of that organization as well.

For the recruitment of advisory council members, there will be an intentional search for diverse and inclusive representation from groups that are typically under-represented, nondominant, or marginalized. The intent is to be as diverse and inclusive as possible.

In an effort to keep the council effective and successful, there will be a limited number of positions available. This may inadvertently cause a lack of representation from one or more groups at various times. OCS will revisit the makeup of the council on an annual basis to ensure all groups are represented at the highest standard possible.

Membership

The council will have no less than eight but no more than 12 members. Council members will be expected to serve at least one year with an opportunity to continue. OCS will review membership makeup annually. There will be no established cycle of replacing members. OCS intends to avoid a council consisting of entirely new members in any particular cycle.

Council participants will have a commitment to, and an interest in, the expectations and goals of the council. If there is more interest than there are council positions available, OCS will add names to a waiting list. Council members may be members of a child support advocacy group (e.g., a fathers' rights group), but priority will be given to individuals who are actual or potential child support customers regardless of whether they are a member of an advocacy group.

OCS will select council members to represent the relevant groups within the child support communities. Criteria for membership will include diversity of opinions and experience, and a balance of cultural and demographic representation. Diverse characteristics among council members should include the following:

- Ability
- Age
- Citizenship status
- Economic class
- Education level
- English as a second language

- Ethnicity
- Gender identity
- Geography
- Race
- Religion
- Sexual orientation

Additionally, council membership will represent fathers, mothers, and other caregivers (e.g., grandparents, aunts, or uncles), either licensed or unlicensed. Care will be taken to ensure representation of mothers and fathers who pay child support, as well as mothers, fathers, and caregivers who receive child support.

The council will not include child support practitioners (staff from OCS, the State Court Administrative Office, Friends of the Court, or Prosecuting Attorney offices) or representatives from the judicial or legal community because these voices are already well-represented within the child support policy development process. Child support practitioners will participate in council meetings only to provide factual information.

The council may invite guest speakers or consultants (e.g., family counselors, community service providers, or educators), but these guests will not be considered formal members of the council or involved in creating recommendations.

Operations

The council will operate under a consensus model in preparing its recommendations. This approach will work to build relationships and reach agreement through discussion and collaborative policy development. Consensus models stress and utilize human capacity for patient cooperation in achieving creative group harmony.

The council will be encouraged to recognize and respect differing opinions and input, and to report a lack of consensus, if necessary. Even when consensus is reached, the council will report on varying perspectives and thoughts.

In the initial meeting(s), OCS will seek to obtain agreement and commitment to meeting mechanics such as location, frequency of meetings, and ground rules. Establishment of the council's community agreement will involve agreeing on behavioral norms and expectations for the group. The council will discuss what kind of accountability or enforcement will occur, if needed.

Meeting locations, times, and dates will be available to the public in advance. Regular meetings will be accessible and open for public observation but not for public comment.

Communication

OCS will provide options to the council for communication between council members and with OCS; the council will discuss these options and decide which options will work best.

The council will develop and propose administrative processes, including the process for providing feedback to OCS. The process will include the council's approach to recording minutes and notes, and creating and distributing special reports, consensus recommendations, and associated council products. The council will recommend its methods for sharing its output and feedback to OCS, OCS's partners, and the public. OCS will provide options to the group for discussion and consensus.

Budget

The council will operate within the MDHHS budgetary and supply guidelines. It will provide the following:

- Stipend: Council members from the community will receive a \$20 stipend per meeting to cover meal and travel expenses.
- Snacks.
- Paper and pens for notetaking.
- Recording device.
- Translation services as needed.
- Childcare.

Evaluation Process

OCS will track policy process statistics and survey council members and guests twice annually for the purposes of process improvement and determining effectiveness. This will include the following:

- Quantitative data: OCS will measure the number of policies that go through the process and the number that do not, as well as how long it takes each policy to go through the process. OCS will measure meeting participation.
- Qualitative data: OCS will survey council members and guests regarding their satisfaction with the council's processes and results.

At the conclusion of each meeting, council members will be given the opportunity to provide anonymous written feedback.

Authorizations/Approvals

Approved by Erin Frisch, Director, Michigan Office of Child Support, 12/10/2019.
Revised and approved: 2/20/2020.